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on Wednesday, 10 July 1996, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. MOUBARAK (Lebanon)
(Vice-President)

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In the absence of Mr. Gervais (Côte d'Ivoire), Mr. Moubarak (Lebanon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (continued)

(c) CONSIDERATION OF THE REPORTS OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARDS OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME/UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND, THE UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND AND THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME (continued) (E/1996/32, parts I and II, E/1996/64/Add.1 and 3, E/1996/68, E/1996/69, E/1996/73 and E/1996/74; E/1996/L.17; DP/1996/11 and 17)

Ms. SHAM POO (Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)), replying to questions raised at the previous meeting, stressed that UNICEF regarded the issues of national execution and capacity-building as critical. National execution through Governments and such national partnerships as non-governmental organizations and grass-roots efforts had long been a cornerstone of UNICEF policy as a means of ensuring sustainability and allowing for the timely phasing-out of the Fund's involvement. That approach to programme delivery had been very successful, even under extremely difficult circumstances.

Regarding payments for common premises, she said that all initial and operating costs were divided among participating agencies, with each paying a share proportional to the amount of space occupied. Turning to the topic of the utilization of core resources, she pointed out that, in the case of all agencies, humanitarian aid was funded through extrabudgetary, not core, resources. UNICEF field representatives had been authorized for many years to raise additional resources in-country, from both donor Governments and the private sector. Such resources, however, were considered to be extrabudgetary and in no way affected the allocation of core resources.

Mr. WILMOT (Ghana) said that in the course of 1996, the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund (UNDP/UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World

Food Programme (WFP) would hold three regular sessions and one annual session. His delegation was of the view that, in order to cut back the cost of conference services, documentation and travel costs, the Executive Boards of those institutions should reduce their regular sessions by one. The reduction would give the secretariats a respite from document preparation that would enable them to carry out proper strategic planning, evaluation and monitoring. Effective working methods, division of work and streamlining in the allocation of agenda items should make it possible for each institution to hold one annual session, preceded by a regular session in the first half of the year and another regular session in the second half of the year.

Considerable attention had been focused on the need to coordinate the operations and activities of the funds and programmes, particularly at the field level, to harmonize budget presentations and to ensure greater budgetary transparency with respect to the use of the resources. In a period of dwindling resources, his delegation welcomed the targeting of resources to needy countries and the emphasis on cost-effective delivery of programmes. It hoped that the new sense of accountability shown by the funds and programmes would result in an additional flow of resources to those bodies.

His delegation welcomed the progress being made in the area of common administrative services and premises. Both the United Nations system agencies and their governmental counterparts would now have the same baseline for the assessment of programmes and performance and would be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes at the national level. The resident coordinator system provided opportunities at the field level for United Nations system agencies to build on previous experience and helped country partners to integrate their assistance in overall national planning and development programmes for maximum effect. The success of the system depended on well-qualified staff; accordingly human resource development was essential. Additional efforts should be made to reinforce the system through the headquarters work of the inter-agency task forces and the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC).

Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/51 highlighted the need to strengthen national capacity for the management and coordination of international assistance and called for high priority to be given to monitoring and evaluation activities and to the implementation of findings. It was time

the funds and programmes redoubled their efforts in those areas, especially in certain parts of Africa and in the least developed countries, where it was particularly difficult to ensure sustainability of programmes.

Ms. BULENOVÁ (Czech Republic) said that her delegation endorsed the statement of the European Union and welcomed the current efforts at reform, particularly those aimed at simplification, harmonization, transparency and accountability. However, it had some doubts as to whether the implemented changes met fully the fundamental needs of countries in transition, especially in terms of the funding, form and content of United Nations assistance. Several funds and programmes had taken into account the specific needs of countries with economies in transition, for example, UNDP had substantially increased assistance to the region of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). However, some countries still received lower development assistance than others with similar gross domestic product per capita. United Nations assistance to countries in the region should be appropriate to their specific needs in order to eliminate the threat of poverty and social unrest and to prepare those countries for the process of economic liberalization. Assistance to those countries should be focused on the establishment of a democratic, legal and institutional framework for a market economy, on providing infrastructure in the transport, telecommunications, financial and banking sectors, on the liberalization of trade and on completing the process of privatization. In that regard, increased cooperation between the Economic Commission for Europe and UNDP would improve the identification of needs, and the implementation of programme activities in the region.

The Government of the Czech Republic was deeply committed to intraregional cooperation. It intended to establish an institutional framework enabling it to gradually increase its assistance. Currently, her country offered assistance, through the United Nations system, to developing countries in such areas as medicine, water resources, agriculture and industrial technologies. It also offered assistance to countries in the region of Eastern Europe and the CIS in various areas of economic transformation, including privatization, financial system development and the establishment of capital markets.

Mr. ISAKOV (Russian Federation) said the most urgent task was to fine-tune the various mechanisms of the resident coordinator system, especially at the regional and country levels, with an emphasis on broadening the

participation of national governmental bodies in the coordination of operational activities. His delegation endorsed the broadening of the operational and financial responsibilities of the country representatives of programmes and funds, as they played an essential role in strengthening national capacity in management and coordination of assistance.

The inter-agency task force and the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP were making a significant contribution to enhancing the effectiveness of emergency humanitarian assistance. Those organizations had valuable experience in combining emergency assistance with the tasks of development, through the use of an integrated approach which included assistance for rehabilitation and recovery. In order to improve inter-agency cooperation in humanitarian assistance, it was essential to clarify the functions of each organization and to strengthen operational and financial capacities for response.

His delegation welcomed the activities of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP in the countries of Eastern Europe and the CIS. UNDP had conducted practical projects in Russia aimed at strengthening government and democratic institutions, promoting socially oriented development and attracting foreign investment. UNDP country projects were being successfully supplemented by regional projects and programmes. In that regard, the UNDP regional office had been particularly active in mobilizing extrabudgetary resources.

Mr. BRESLER (United States of America) said his delegation agreed with the representative of Ghana that consideration should be given to reducing the number of regular sessions of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP to two per year. The sessions could be extended by a few days, leaving adequate time for oversight and for the Boards to receive the information they required in order to discharge their duties. Such a reduction would succeed provided that sound methods of work were used and that statements not germane to the issues were avoided.

Mr. YUAN Shaofu (China) said that, since the introduction of reforms in the work of the governing bodies of the relevant funds and programmes in 1994, the efficiency of their deliberations had noticeably improved, as had their overall guidance of their respective organizations. On the question of the frequency of the governing bodies' sessions, his delegation believed that the first and second regular sessions of those bodies should be consolidated into a single session, whose duration should be increased if necessary. The

Council should provide guidance on the matter, and he wished to hear the Secretariat's views as well.

Mr. WARDHANA (Indonesia) said that his delegation welcomed the increased collaboration between members of the United Nations development system, in particular with respect to reporting. It also welcomed the progress made by the governing bodies of the relevant organizations in response to paragraph 55 of General Assembly resolution 50/120 and was pleased to note that the specialized agencies had responded to paragraph 30 of the resolution on the critical question of supporting and strengthening national execution of United Nations-funded programmes and projects, and that they intended to follow a common reporting format.

He underscored how crucial coordination at the field level was for the purpose of accelerating the promotion and strengthening of capacity-building and national execution. His delegation hoped that UNDP would strengthen its overall cooperation with the regional commissions and was pleased that measures would be introduced to assist the incorporation of regional dimensions in country strategy notes. He requested clarification of the UNDP proposal to assist recipient countries, in particular the least developed countries, to formulate and incorporate such elements in their country strategy notes. Since not all countries had such notes, where necessary an appropriate substitute should be found, bearing in mind the importance of national ownership of regional programmes.

In a recent briefing, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs had stated, with reference to the possibility that the resident coordinators also might coordinate humanitarian assistance in the field, that his Department should remain the lead agency for such assistance. His delegation wished to know what mechanisms would be established if resident coordinators were entrusted with such responsibilities.

The operational activities of the United Nations should be reinforced and directed towards redressing continuing imbalances in international development cooperation. The international community also must mobilize adequate support to strengthen those activities, in particular, through the provision of new and additional resources.

Mr. GALVEZ (Chile) said that his delegation was pleased that UNDP was working to strengthen the resident coordinator system and that the Programme

emphasized national execution and national and local capacity development in the preparation of country strategy notes. He commended UNDP on its humanitarian activities. The mission statement adopted by the Executive Board of UNDP at its annual session was an important document for the conduct of the Programme's work and a very useful tool for informing world public opinion of United Nations efforts to promote human development. Similarly, the mission statement of UNFPA would help to garner public support for the crucial work of the Fund in the battle against AIDS.

His delegation was particularly appreciative of the work of UNICEF in support of the 20/20 initiative, in humanitarian emergencies and in times of war. It welcomed the commitment of WFP to the success of the resident coordinator system, its support for the preparation of country strategy notes and for the programme approach, as well as its efforts to strengthen national capacity for the management and coordination of international assistance, in particular, through the use of advisory services.

Although further progress was desirable with respect to improving monitoring and evaluation in the field, coordinating and harmonizing plans and projects, reducing costs and making projects more attractive to donors, the process of reform and restructuring was progressing smoothly.

Mr. SYARGEEU (Belarus) welcomed the emphasis on the national execution of technical assistance projects and the steps taken by UNDP to coordinate technical assistance at the regional and subregional levels. His delegation agreed with the delegation of the Czech Republic that greater attention should be focused on the countries in transition. His Government urged UNDP to support the convening of an international conference of the countries in transition in the spring of 1997. It also welcomed the positive response by the UNDP secretariat to the letter from the Permanent Representatives of 16 countries in Central and Eastern Europe concerning the need for additional financial resources for the nations in that region. The current resource allocation system was unfair.

His delegation agreed that it was necessary to strengthen the capacity of the funds and programmes to provide emergency assistance and training in disaster preparedness. It favoured the preparation by UNICEF of a new model agreement on cooperation with non-governmental organizations at the regional level. It was essential to ensure that emergency assistance was not provided at

the expense of programme resources, and it was important not to lose sight of the need to ensure a transition from emergency assistance to long-term development. The needs of victims of natural disasters must also be borne in mind. It should be assumed that most emergencies would have long-term consequences; the health problems in his country resulting from the Chernobyl disaster provided a notable example. His delegation was in favour of close coordination between WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA on health care policy issues.

The enhancement of the regional and subregional activities of United Nations funds and programmes would not represent a departure from the country programming approach; on the contrary, it would entail greater involvement on the part of Governments and civil society.

His delegation was in favour of the establishment by UNICEF of a regional office in Geneva for the countries of Eastern Europe and the CIS and the dispatch of missions to various countries in the region. In conclusion, his delegation endorsed the views of the representative of Ghana with respect to the rationalization of the work of the various Executive Boards.

Ms. SEALY MONTEITH (Jamaica) paid a tribute to UNICEF on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary. Her delegation welcomed the clear and concise reports prepared by the various Executive Boards on their sessions. She expressed her delegation's sincere appreciation to UNICEF for the assistance it had provided to Jamaica and to the Caribbean region as a whole over the years. Her country looked forward to continuing its participation in the management excellence programme.

Jamaica, like most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, had accomplished most or all of the mid-decade goals established by the World Summit for Children. Nevertheless, those countries would continue to require the assistance of UNICEF and of the United Nations system as a whole as they strove for a better life for all children.

Ms. HENKIN (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) said that work on harmonizing the presentation of budgets and accounts had begun in 1995 following decisions 95/30 of the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board and 1995/37 of the UNICEF Executive Board. For the second regular sessions of the Executive Boards earlier in 1996, the organizations had carried out a comparison of their 1996-1997 budgets. The results indicated that the differences between UNDP and UNFPA on the one hand and UNICEF on the other were significant, concerning not

only presentation but also the scope and content of the budget. However, the different nature of the three organizations must be taken into account: UNDP was essentially a funding organization which also provided and financed support for the operational activities of the United Nations system as a whole; UNICEF was a funding and implementing organization; and UNFPA was a funding organization which also executed parts of its programme.

At the annual session of the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board in May 1996, and subsequently at that of the UNICEF Executive Board in June 1996, the organizations had reported that they were addressing harmonization under five main headings: scope and content, and specifically the applicability to UNFPA and UNDP of the integrated budget approach recently adopted by UNICEF involving the inclusion of programme activity estimates in the biennial budget document; definitions, whereby an in-depth analysis was being undertaken to identify clearly what constituted programme activities as opposed to activities in support of programmes; common presentation styles, and specifically the development of a common or fully comparable table reflecting resource utilization; harmonization of key budgetary classifications; and common terminology for the identification of primary groupings of resources.

Further progress had been reported at the annual session of the UNICEF Executive Board in June 1996 on the development of a common resource plan and the related definitions or components to be included under each heading. The resource plan would have three sections: total resources available to the organization; the use of resources, classified under three main headings; and the reconciliation of the estimates included under the use of resources with the budget estimates. The Executive Board of UNICEF had adopted decision 1996/16, which in turn had been endorsed by the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board, on the question of the timing and nature of future reports on budget harmonization.

Mrs. REBONG (Philippines) said that immediate steps must be taken to implement paragraphs 76 and 78 of General Assembly resolution 50/227 in order to reduce the proliferation and overlapping of formal and informal meetings of governing bodies of the United Nations development programmes and funds and ensure the effective participation of observer member States and observer States in the sessions of the Executive Boards.

Mr. STENSBOL (Observer for Denmark) said that his delegation appreciated the progress made so far by UNFPA and looked forward its future efforts.

Mr. CHATAIGNER (France) asked whether UNFPA would be able to prepare a new budget for 1998-1999 within the timetable for the harmonization process; whether further working meetings would be held between September 1996 and the time of transmission of the budget information to ACABQ; and whether the working documentation of the September session of the Executive Boards would be made available in all the working languages.

Mr. HJELMAKER (Sweden) said that his delegation was gratified that progress was being made in the budget harmonization process. The joint progress report was a very good step in the right direction. He endorsed the comments made by the representative of the Philippines.

Ms. BERGERON (Canada) said that the results achieved by UNFPA were very encouraging.

Ms. HENKIN (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) said that UNFPA expected to be able to present the 1998-1999 budget within the timetable, especially if there was a productive dialogue at the informal meetings that would be held, one before September 1996, and others before the submission was made to ACABQ. UNFPA would take up the matter of the availability of working documentation in all languages with the secretariats of the Executive Boards.

Mr. RAZA (Pakistan) said that, on the subject of the status of mission statements, it had been made clear in decisions by UNDP and UNFPA that those statements were for the internal use of organizations, as distinct from policy statements. Some confusion appeared to exist in UNICEF; decision 1996/27 referred to the UNICEF mission statement and relevant documents. A clear distinction must be drawn in any decisions taken by the Council.

The PRESIDENT drew attention to decision 1996/18, entitled "Commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the operations of the United Nations Children's Fund", contained in chapter III of the report of the UNICEF Executive Board on its second regular session of 1996 (E/1996/32, part II). He took it that the Council endorsed the decision and recommended its approval to the General Assembly at its fifty-first session.

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT suggested that the Council should take note of the following documents: reports of the UNICEF Executive Board on its first and second regular sessions of 1996 (E/1996/32, Parts I and II); note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled

"United Nations system common premises and services in the field" and the comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination thereon (E/1996/43 and A/51/124-E/1996/44); report of the Secretary-General entitled "Progress on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120" (E/1996/64 and Add.1, Add.2 and Corr.1, and Add.3); annual report of UNFPA to the Council (E/1996/68); annual report of UNICEF to the Council (E/1996/69); note by the Secretariat on strengthening collaboration between the United Nations development system and the Bretton Woods institutions in the areas of social and economic development at all levels, including the field level (E/1996/72); report of the Executive Board of the World Food Programme (E/1996/73); report of the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board on its annual session for 1996 (E/1996/74); report of the UNICEF Executive Board on its 1996 annual session (E/1996/L.19); report of the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board on its first regular session of 1996 (DP/1996/11); and report of the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board on its second regular session of 1996 (DP/1996/17).

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.